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Entertainment News: Agitprop to Colbertisms

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ENTERTAINMENT NEWS: FROM AGITPROP TO COLBERTISMS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

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By Chanelle R. Vigue, BFA

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Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes
Director of Graduate Studies Department of Theatre

At the beginning of the twentieth century, newspaper theatre was born from the need to inform those who could not read the news for themselves. There have been many contributors and influential factors to the multi-faceted evolution of newspaper theatre. Contributors include Meyerhold, Piscator, Brecht, Hallie Flanagan and Arthur Arent, and Augusto Boal. Influential factors include technology, politics, and the influence of theatrical movements. The most popular and most frequent contributors to contemporary newspaper theatre are the legitimate news media and comedy news shows.

Introduction

“Documentary theatre” is one of those terms introduced by critics to describe a specific production, and then thrown around long enough to attract the attention of scholars. So far, those scholars have collectively written numerous books, completed many studies, and published a large quantity of articles in journals, but have yet to agree on the precise definition and subsequent categories of “documentary theatre.” However, there are some accepted distinguishing factors that mark a theatrical piece as a candidate for being documentary theatre. These include: Brechtian-Piscatorian stagecraft, episodic or epic structure, text drawn from actual documents or factual evidence, and content drawn from real events or situations (Dawson 12). These elements also mark most of the newspaper theatre that I will be discussing in this paper. These plays, like most newspaper theatre, is qualify as documentary theatre, though the exact classification depends on which scholar is consulted.

For the purpose of this thesis, my own definition of newspaper theatre is a theatre form consisting of:

1. A structure that is episodic and employs the distancing and multimedia techniques of Brecht or Piscator. Newspaper theatre’s structure is based on an overarching theme that is addressed through short scenes involving allegorical characters interacting with specific, recognizable figures, such as contemporary politicians, or representatives of social positions, such as the worker. This structure often calls for a narrator to unify these

short scenes and provide additional information, as well as projections of pictures, film clips, or scene titles with which the actors interact or which comment on the action.

2. Content that has to do with a current or ongoing situation affecting the target audience. The content of newspaper theatre is in the news (reported or otherwise) at the time the piece is being produced – it is immediate and provides information to a citizenship that can still act to change the events that are taking place.

3. Text that is fact based, which includes direct use of actual testimony or documents as well as references to and representations of verifiable statistics, laws, people, places, and events. The text of a newspaper theatre play is taken from both primary and secondary sources, but is always based on fact. People that are well-known public figures may appear on-stage, often including public officials or celebrities. There may also be scenes that are hypothetical, involving fictional characters speaking fictional dialogue, yet are based on the documented existence of certain situations or probable outcomes of the current situations.

4. The dual intent of educating and entertaining the audience; plays may include but do not require a call to action. This means that the events, information, and situations addressed must be taken seriously and presented honestly, and they also must be theatrical – this often means incorporating the dramatic, tragic, comedic, and spectacular in a single show.

As these brackets are still fairly wide, I will address some things that newspaper theatre is definitely not: Newspaper theatre is not historical reenactment on any scale. It is

not historical drama. It is not Emily Mann's theatre of testimony or Brecht's theatre of allegory. It is also not straight documentary. It is not a social satire, though it may have satiric scenes or moments. It is not an American musical, a vaudeville show, or a melodrama. It is not realistic drama, but it is also not a play in the style of the expressionist, surrealist, or naturalist movements. It is none of these things because it incorporates *all* of these things – there are sections of newspaper theatre plays that are direct quotations from speeches, the Congressional Record, newspaper articles, interviews, and other media. Like newspapers, these plays incorporate the commentary of the reporter and the political slant of the publishing house; there is room for cartoons, puzzles, horoscopes, and human-interest stories; and all of these things are brought together in theatrical form the same way layout and editing is done for a daily paper. Newspaper theatre developed from and with all of these other forms in the context of larger culture that was also developing film, radio and television techniques. As described in by Morgan Himelstein in *Drama was a Weapon*, newspaper theatre grew into “present[ing] its facts and opinions directly to the audience by means of such diverse techniques as projected diagrams, radio announcements, pantomimes, sound effects, blackout skits, and music. This rapid flow of stage pictures was a combination of the agitprop, the motion picture, and the musical review” (89).

In this thesis I will be focusing how the newspaper theatre form developed from agitprop theatre. I will specifically discuss the Blue Blouse and Prolet-Büene style of methods and productions, and the Living Newspapers that were performed from 1936 to 1939 by the Federal Theatre Project. I will then look at a few modern incarnations of

newspaper theatre including Augusto Boal's methods, legitimate news media broadcasting, and news-based comedy programs, specifically The Daily Show and The Colbert Report.

Chapter One 1920-1935

A. Proletkult, Agitprop, and Blue Blouses

Proletkult refers to the proletarian culture that developed in the young Soviet Union. The artistic movement that it supported was based on the idea that to produce work that was meaningful to the proletariat the artist must have experienced the proletarian lifestyle and culture, the artist must in fact be of the proletarian class. This movement had an important influence on the Blue Blouse movement that grew up after it, and on many future theatre practitioners and other artists.

Agitprop is a broad term often referring to political theatre popularized by the communist worker's theatres in Russia and Germany in the 1920s and 30s. There are many different types of agitprop performance styles popularized by many different people and non-professional theatre groups, including mass action spectacles, mass chant, and living newspapers (Markov 138). Mass action spectacles, the largest agitprop form, were enormous undertakings involving thousands of people, the most famous of which was a reenactment of *The Taking of the Winter Palace* directed by Evreinov that was staged in Leningrad in 1920, which involved "cavalry, artillery, infantry...[and] over 6,000 people" (Markov 135-6). While other scholars claim that the number involved in the performance was nearer 8,000 (Bradby 23), there is no doubt that it was indeed a massive spectacle – the last act included actually invading and conquering the palace. Mass chant was "well suited to the demands of amateur groups who could often achieve an impressive degree of

discipline in group speaking, but whose members might find it hard to sustain a large individual role” (Bradby 22). They often had short, episodic and often satiric scripts that required little rehearsal and called for direct address to the audience, choral chanting, and audience participation. Blue Blouses were groups that were organized and controlled and provided performance material by a central organization within the Soviet Institute of Journalism, which published material in the journal entitled *Blue Blouse*. The over 7,000 troupes would perform everything from full scenes from plays to vaudeville and other “music hall styles” (Markov 139). Their relationship of the performer to audience was radical in that it was more familiar, like that found in the music hall rather than in the theatre. The shows presented by Blue Blouse troupes were very much centered on the approved political themes and prescribed outlooks of the Party (Kleberg 117). The living newspaper form was often used by Blue Blouse troupes. Though the form started as mass readings of news stories designed to inform those that were illiterate about the status of the revolution, they soon began to incorporate scenes being acted out while they were read. Costumes, makeup, and even acrobatics followed. A typical Living Newspaper evening program, according to Stourac and McCreery, would begin with a headline parade in which the entire troupe of between twelve and twenty people would enter, all wearing blue blouses and black pants or skirts to identify them as factory workers and members of the worker class, singing their headlines. This would be followed by choral chant or speech that was usually accompanied by music and often on a serious topic. The entire evening was designed around a single theme, with each short segment going into deeper and deeper detail to evoke further understanding of the situation in the audience. As the evening went

on, the pieces also grew funnier and sillier, as if one were flipping through the leisure, arts, and comics page of the printed newspaper. A living poster, which called for actors to act through cardboard cut-outs, folk-style rhymes, and “quick-fire speeches or stories” (Stourac 36) were also often included before a local theme was addressed and the final march ended the show with another choral song. All of these smaller forms of agitprop could be performed anywhere and were often done on street corners, during strikes, labor union meetings, and Party events.

Unlike most drama, agitprops do not have realistic characters but contain cartoon-like, allegorical generalizations. The most famous agitprop characters include the Worker, always one of many and easily replaced, and the cartoon Capitalist who spouts the catch phrases of contemporary politicians from a soapbox while costumed in an oversized red, white and blue top hat.

While much of this form sounds very close to the way I defined newspaper theatre it is in the intent of the performance that they differ most. Agitprop was meant to “lure non-Communists to Party Headquarters and send Communists to the barricades,” to incite immediate action (Himmelstein 9). The ultimate goal of newspaper theatre is an informed audience, by contrast, it informs while entertaining which may or may not lead to direct action.

B. Agents of Change

In Russia, Vsevolod Meyerhold was instrumental in popularizing the idea of theatre outside of the traditional theatres, of content and staging beyond the boundaries drawn in

the art's past. The Blue Blouse entertainments were visibly influenced by his concept of juxtaposing movement and text and distorting expected audience relations. They used his idea of physical training and biomechanics style of acting, which complemented the ideology behind the founding of the communist theatre clubs themselves: to educate and work towards becoming the ideal Soviet citizen.

In Germany, it was Erwin Piscator who took the living newspaper form and further developed it, and it was he who put on stage many of the techniques that Brecht (with whom he worked in the 1920s) would later appropriate for his theories of Epic Theatre, specifically the use of theatrical techniques found in popular entertainments and the influence of three of Piscator's major concepts;

1. Theatre should be popular;
2. That staging should demystify the theatre and encourage conscious suspense of disbelief;
3. That the theatre is a powerful political force that can be applied to modern

society. The first idea is that the theatre should be accessible, relevant, and made for and by the people that would see it. The second concept, though very influential on the development of Brecht's theories, is actually where they differ decisively. Piscator wanted his audience to engage emotionally in the action of the play, to become brothers in arms with his protagonists, to join the fight that they were fighting. "Piscator clearly welcomed this emotional involvement that in a sense restored the illusionism of Naturalist theatre, but with the difference that the fourth wall was effectively removed to allow the

audience to feel themselves a part of the action; they were no longer voyeurs but participants” (Patterson 130).

The third major concept was influential on not only Brecht but many other theatre artists. Piscator tried with all his might to create a political theatre, a theatre that would allow audiences to better understand the world and society around them. He may not have ever fully realized his lofty goals, but he took the steps necessary for others to fulfill his dreams. One of those steps was “the application of documentary principles to the theatre...His shows were massively researched and drew on all the latest techniques of lighting and stage machinery including much use of projected material (slide, cartoon, documentary film)” (Bradby 23). He used film to show the passing of time with real locations and reenactments of actual events that were in the memories of his audiences. He saw and capitalized on the potential of using both popular and traditional theatrical elements together to stage plays that were related to real current events and drew popular audiences. He attempted to create the wide-angle lens that allowed an audience to understand themselves as part of a pattern in history, and as the products of historical patterns. Unfortunately, “Piscator was a theatrical genius, and in common with many innovative geniuses who worked in the theatre...he depended on and was held back by the inadequate technical capabilities of the theatre of his day” (Patterson 146). He spent many rehearsals struggling with failing technology, overwhelmed technical operators, and malfunctions. Piscator was exiled during World War II, but continued to develop his form while in the US until the 1950s.

Bertolt Brecht, as a student of Piscator, playwright, director, dramaturg and theorist, had a definite impact on the development of newspaper theatre. His Epic Theatre used many of the techniques I will analyze later as seen in the Federal Theatre Project's Living Newspapers; including his desire for the audience to be aware that "what was...narrated on stage happened as a result of alterable causes" which the traditional dramatic theatre had previously left unquestioned (Patterson 153). As Bradby and McCormick assert "what Brecht most disliked and reacted against was the professional's view of the theatre as an end in itself. He wanted the theatre to accept its responsibilities as *the* social art, with the utilitarian purpose of communicating with ordinary people about the things that mattered most to them" (111). To be clear, Brecht did not actually participate in or write newspaper theatre. Brecht's political allegories do examine and allow communication about current themes, though his plays speak from the safety of distance in both time and location. He often used Shakespeare's trick of placing modern characters in a distant past in order to comment on the current situation.

His staging techniques were also adapted to many later newspaper theatre shows, especially the rejection of illusory scenery and box sets. Newspaper theatre often calls for a stage that can be transformed quickly between extremely different locations within both time and space, and therefore expressionist and minimalist sets that are given atmosphere through lighting and sound are often employed to greater success than any realistic set could hope to accomplish.

Between 1926 and 1931, there were three productions in Germany of Brecht's play, *Man ist Mann*, and he had become a popular playwright with worker's theatres, though he

was not a member of the Communist Party. By 1935, his work had even begun to be produced in the U.S. with the Theatre Union's production of *Mother*. While the run was unsuccessful, the fact that Brecht's work was being produced in New York certainly added to his influence on the developing forms, especially the soon to emerging American newspaper theatre.

C. The American Stewpot

In Germany and Russia nearly every village had at least one agitprop troupe, but the form had not truly taken hold in the U.S. Agitprop continued to struggle in its new democratic and capitalist environment and eventually, the form itself began to change, incorporating realistic elements into characters, expressive elements into design, and relying more on the actors to have formal training and greater ability to embody characters, rather than stereotypes. There are many reasons for this, but Harold Clurman effectively summed it up when he wrote the following:

The most significant difference between the theatre of the twenties and that of the thirties is the emphasis in the later period on the social, economic and political background of the individual psychological case. The Wall Street crash of 1929, the Great Depression of the early thirties with its attendant scar of widespread unemployment, the hopeful attempt to remedy this bitter condition which ensued are the effective causes for the abrupt and drastic change. ("Theatre of the Thirties" 4)

This difference was made theatrically viable because of the merging of the stylized agitprop form and the realistic and expressionistic forms present in the dramas of the 1920s. The first agitprop troupe in the U.S. was the Worker's Theatre League, formed in 1926 by Michael Gold and John Dos Passos. They produced Gold's play, *Strike!* for performance in support of a textile workers' strike in New Jersey. *Strike!* used standard agitprop content, "There is the usual opposition of Capitalist and Workers: in this case Poverty interrupts a board meeting chaired by Wealth and reminds the members of the board about the consequences of their actions" (Bradby 101). Other agitprop troupes in the US in the late 1920s and early 30s were the German-speaking Prolet-Büene and the Communist Party operated Worker's League of Theatres, or the WLT (Himmelstein 9). The WLT, one of the many groups that contributed to the evolution of the agitprop form, was founded in 1930. At one point it had a repertory of 83 skits about the Depression, the New Deal, New York politics, politicians, and foreign affairs. They, along with Prolet-Büene also performed mass chants like those in *Strike!* and class illustrations like *Fifteen Minute Red Review*, which uses repetition and symbolism to call workers together in support of Soviet Russia.

In 1933 the WLT created its "Shock Troupe," a contingent of actors ready to perform agitprops anywhere at any time. It was that same year that the WLT performed their only really successful agitprop, which moved away from the traditional structure of the form. *Newsboy* was designed to be performed indoors and used light to accentuate the characterization and symbolism in the play, and had two characters that were not the

standard worker cartoon in blue collars. The play (as performed by the WLT and printed in Williams' *Stage Left* on pages 90-96) addresses racism, the depression, unemployment, and the fallacy of the news all in a little under fifteen minutes. The scene opens on a newsboy yelling headlines about celebrities and sports, then pan handling as a chorus of passers-by chants back at him "seventeen million men and women." The Newsboy eventually gets a dime, but has to defend it from another beggar while a black man enters and joins the chorus, shouting out, "You hear? Seventeen white men take a black man for a ride, and string him up a tree, and fill his body full of holes because a white woman said he smiled at her." The stage directions describe an abstract reenactment of that scene; the intimidation, the mob tactics, and the cruelty are seen. The actual violence, however, is implied in a black out. The action continues while the lights are out, in hurried whispers, the chorus lists a number of recent events involving hate-crimes with black people being victimized by whites and the chorus chanting "electrocuted, lynched, hanged, murdered, shot." The lights come back up and the chorus turns to face the audience one by one, each holding a copy of *The Daily Worker*, and a final speech is a call to action, "Time to revolt! Get yourself a trumpet, buddy, a big...red...trumpet!"

Newsboy was so successful that it not only won the League of Workers Theatre's Second National Theatre Festival in 1934, but it was also "the most widely performed piece in the repertory of workers' theatres, making its way as far as London" (Williams 98).

One other notable person was also experimenting with agitprop in the early 30s—Hallie Flanagan, then artistic director of the Vassar Experimental Theatre. In fact Flanagan

is credited (or blamed, depending on your stance) along with other unnamed theatre artists “like her” by Himmelstein for giving agitprop “artistic respectability” in the US for her Vassar staging of the agitprop plays *We Demand* and *Miners are Striking* as well as her own 1931 play *Can You Hear Their Voices* (11). Flanagan was using the form in an educational setting, not for the intent of recruiting Communists, but to explore its theatrical possibilities. *Can You Hear Their Voices*, co-authored by Margaret Helen Clifford, is much more like the later socialist realism and newspaper theatre than a traditional agitprop, as it incorporates characters with individual emotional reasons for revolution as well as presenting juxtaposed elements of a current event as part of a story that ends with a compelling call to action. The script was a “carefully documented dramatization of Whittaker Chambers’ account of the Arkansas drought” that was presented in theatres across the nation and was purchased by theatres around the world (Mathews 20).

Can You Hear Their Voices centers on a community of farmers in Arkansas who are suffering from the drought – the cows are dead or dying, the babies need milk; they are helping each other out to make sure that each one survives. Scenes switch between each of these families, group scenes in which they discuss their troubles and take action together, and scenes about a second group of characters. These are the wealthy Senator and his well-educated and liberal-minded daughter, who points out the irony of throwing a half-million dollar coming out party while people are starving all across the country. Her father sincerely explains to her that the money will “trickle down” into the pockets of those less fortunate, so long as the wealthy continue to spend. In the course of the plot, the wealthy drink and dance while the poor starve. One woman kills her baby to put it out of its misery.

The play ends with the farmers rioting at the Red Cross food station, which has refused them food because the station does not have enough official forms. The short closing scene takes place the next morning, the men who know that they will be arrested wait for their fate, and two young boys are sent by their father to Communist Headquarters to tell their story.

The New York Times critic who wrote about the show proclaimed that the show was “a play in which propaganda did not defeat drama, as usually happened, because it was all propaganda – scaring, biting, smashing propaganda” (qtd. in Mathews 23). Jane De Hart Mathews maintains that while “conservatives found the play too radical; radicals, too conservative” the author and soon to be Head of the Federal Theatre Project simply saw it as “ simply theatre at its best – experimental, challenging, and, above all, relevant to the world of hunger and privation outside the tree-filled [Vassar] campus in Poughkeepsie” (22). Discussion of Hallie Flanagan’s contribution to the development of early newspaper theatre is often limited to her encouragement and support of the Federal Theatre Project, but it is clear that her contribution to the development of the form was much more direct and much earlier than she is often given credit for.

This success of agitprop plays and the changing needs of the Party began to change the way the Party used drama, and the call for plays in union magazines and workers’ theatre began to reflect this. Rather than asking for agitprops or “conversion” plays, they began to ask for “short, realistic dramas on proletarian themes” that they hoped would appeal to larger audiences (Himelstein 18).

Out of this movement towards a labor theatre rather than a Party theatre and the advancing stagecraft of the form came *Waiting for Lefty*. Produced by the Group Theatre, the play opened at another New Theatre Night, this one in January of 1935 and would become the most produced labor play in the U.S. It still held on to the episodic structure, quick filmic blackouts, direct address, use of Marxist slogans, and an explicit call to action that were mandatory in agitprop plays; however it outgrew agitprop by supplying sympathetic protagonists that were individuals with realistic emotional motivations to join the Party. The three capitalist villains remained caricatures with no sympathetic aspects, but even they had names, specific job titles and job related motivations. Other things that made *Lefty* remarkable were the use of realistic speech patterns and language, and the staging – the entire theatre was used as the union hall where most of the play takes place. Another important consideration is that the entire play was performed by members of the Group Theatre, all of who were by this time rehearsing with the Stanislavski method, which certainly added to the sense of individuality and plight of the characters they played.

D. 1935

In the year 1935, amazing and terrible things happened all around the world. The first worldwide telephone call and the first flight across the Pacific were made. Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. Steinbeck published *Tortilla Flat* and Claudette Colbert, Frank Capra and Clark Gable won Academy Awards for the film *It Happened One Night*. The German Nazi government repealed the citizenship of German Jews. President Roosevelt signed many major legislations, including the bill that would establish the Works Progress

Administration, and under it, the Federal Theatre Project. Radio shows premiered based on the hit comic strips Flash Gordon, Dick Tracy and Popeye the Sailor Man. Congress passed the Neutrality Act, officially maintaining neutrality in the conflict surrounding Ethiopia. *Jubilee* and George and Ira Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* opened on Broadway. *The March of Time*, a series of newsreels and radio shows began the never-ending trend of selling Americans on America and what it means to be American (The March). The New York Times published a two page article called "The Theatre of the Left," describing the lively and ambitious projects that were beginning to draw noticeable crowds to a new part of the city.

Chapter Two The United States and a Brief Encounter with National Theatre

In an age of terrific implications as to wealth and poverty, as to the function of government, as to peace and war, as to the relation of the artist to all these forces, the theatre must grow up. The theatre must become conscious of the implications of the changing social order, or the social order will ignore, and rightly, the implications of the theatre.

-Hallie Flanagan, National Director of the Federal Theatre Project (Arena

46)

The Living Newspaper was one of five units of the Federal Theatre Project that was founded as part of the WPA relief efforts in 1935. There was strong resistance to the government “entering show business” as many papers and letters to the editors referred to the effort. There were, however, over 12,000 unemployed professional theatre people in the year the project was funded. The purpose of the FTP was threefold: To employ as many theatre people as possible, to produce quality work that would reach a new and much broader audience through low-cost tickets and a wide range of programming, and to produce and encourage new American works to enrich our national theatre.

As proposed by Hallie Flanagan, director of the national Project, the Living Newspapers were designed to use as many actors, technicians, researchers and other out-of-work theatre people as possible, but they were also an active venue for experimentation in both staging and written form and theatricality. The Living Newspaper unit was backed by the newspaper guild and headed by Morris Watson under the direction of Elmer Rice. Besides large casts, all of the FTP's Living Newspapers possess an episodic structure, text based in fact, music, projections, and stereotyped, cartoonish characters along side somewhat more realistic, though still archetypal, characters. These archetypal characters are often victims of other forces or groups of people with more power, and quite frequently are treated as such. Though, according to Laura Browder, "At their best, the Living Newspapers represented American history to a mass audience in a way that not only enabled spectators to see how different constituencies had shaped the course of current events but also offered them ways to change the course of future events" (122). Even those characters that are victims come to see themselves as a force with the power to act on the world around them.

The FTP Living Newspapers, like those of the Blue Blouse troupes in Soviet Russia, were based on current news events, including the Depression, New Deal politics, wars, and foreign policy debacles domestic discontent. They were inevitably political. As with all art that concerns itself with things political, and even more so as the producer of these plays was ultimately the United States government, the entire Project caused a stir in the press and ruffled quite a few political feathers. The Living Newspaper was constantly plagued with the threat of censorship, beginning with its very first show.

According to Hallie Flanagan, “We had decided on *Ethiopia*, partly because it was big news at the time and partly because we had a large group of Negro dancers and actors on the project. By November the research was complete, the script ready, rehearsals under way and the Biltmore Theatre the rendezvous point for directors, actors and writers interested in the new form” (Federal Theatre Plays viii).

The show written by Arthur Arent was set all over the world, flashing quickly from one country to another in very short scenes, utilizing teletype projections to announce the location as actors portraying real leaders, ambassadors, and reporters depicted the whirlwind of action and reactions that led to the crises. These representations included President Roosevelt, Mussolini, and Haile Selassie, among many others, and their speeches were drawn completely from the texts of their speeches, interviews, and statements. An exceptional example of what would become the Living Newspaper’s trademark blood-pumping, adrenaline-soaring style is scene 14:

Scene 14

Teletype: WAR DRUMS BEAT OVER EUROPE:

The figures as they speak are lit up by pin spots and blacked out. They are all

dressed in uniforms of the countries they represent. There is a projection of marching feet, and the tramp, tramp, tramp is amplified on the sound system.

England: Home Fleet in the Mediterranean!

Italy: 300,000 troops in Africa!

Ethiopia: A rifle for every man!

France: Half a million under arms!

Rumania [spelling in original]: More planes!

Poland: More soldiers!

Japan: More troops to China!

Germany: More money for guns!

Russia: One million men in uniform!

England: Oil sanctions!

Italy: Sanctions mean war!

Ethiopia: 200 killed today!

France: France fights beside Britain!

Rumania: Rumania backs France!

Poland: Re-arm!

Japan: Naval Parity!

Germany: Heil Hitler!

Russia: Down with Fascism!

England: Watch Italy!

Italy: Watch Britain!

Ethiopia: Fight to the death!

France: Watch Germany!

Rumania: Be ready!

Poland: More bullets!

Japan: Watch Russia!

Russia: Watch Japan!

Germany: Der Tag!

*The single word "war" is passed right down the line, from England to Germany,
the music blares out in a mounting climax, the feet tramp louder.*

Blackout (Ethiopia 31)

When Watson asked permission to use a transcript of a speech given by Roosevelt he was informed in a memo from Baker that:

“No issue of the living newspaper shall contain any representation of the head or one of the ministers of or cabinet of a foreign state unless such representations have been approved in advance by the Department of State. In view of the impracticalities of getting advance approval in sufficient time to give timeliness to the performances of the living newspaper, it seems to me that it is necessary that there not be included any representations of such persons” (Arena 65-66).

Despite the fact that Baker did relent and say that the Living Newspapers could quote those people so long as they were not personally represented, it was too late for *Ethiopia*, and too much for Elmer Rice.

Elmer Rice refused to be censored by Washington after being assured that they would be allowed to be “free, adult, and uncensored,” so he threatened to resign his post as

he had done on a number of prior occasions. This time Baker had a typed letter of acceptance of Rice's resignation in his desk drawer, which he produced during their meeting with Hallie Flanagan (Arena 67). The next day, the only performance of *Ethiopia* was given for an invited audience of the press.

In the write up of the performance by the New York Times, Brooks Atkinson writes: "*Ethiopia* is no masterpiece. But as a living newspaper account of a breach of peace that is happening under our nose it is sobering and impressive – even frightening. Although this correspondent had no genuine expectations for the project for dramatizing the news, the result amply justifies the hard work that has gone into it." He goes on to call the reporting of the events fair and unbiased, claiming that because the League of Nations had already imparted sanctions and named Italy the aggressor, the show had to be biased against Italy. Atkinson then concludes that because the US is officially neutral in the conflict, the Living Newspaper was justifiably banned and that any theatre done under the banner of the government was incapable of being free and uncensored. Hallie Flanagan argued at the time that Atkinson's conclusions were false. For a few years Flanagan won out, thanks in part to Rice's protest, but Atkinson's statements were eventually proven prophetic.

Even though *Ethiopia* was only presented once, its form was groundbreaking. The use of technology, dangerous subject matter, the living newspaper format, and even the drama surrounding its censorship all contribute to the historic nature of the show itself.

In a New York Times article dated January 28th 1936, Flanagan and Barber promise that the FTP will follow the banned production with another Living Newspaper, a “factual and unbiased presentation” addressing the Triple A (“WPA to Give Play on Farm Problem”). Throughout the article the idea of censorship is discussed, though thoroughly refuted as future policy by Flanagan and Philip Barber, Mr. Rice’s replacement as New York’s Regional Director of the FTP.

Triple A Plowed Under was the second Living Newspaper written and the first to be performed for a full run. Written by “the staff of the living newspaper and supervised by Arthur Arent,” it opened at the Biltmore Theatre in New York on March 14, 1936 (Federal Theatre Plays 3). Thirty policemen stood outside the theatre before, during and after the show, as rumbling of communist propaganda had already begun. Several things threatened to close this second attempt at a living newspaper. The first was the cast itself. Hallie Flanagan describes her version of the events in the introduction to the published book of Federal Theatre Plays featuring three Living Newspapers as follows; “During rehearsals of *Triple A Plowed Under* we had a one night rebellion of some of the actors [...] that did not want to appear in this kind of performance...They complained that there was no plot, no story, no chance to build up a character, no public interest in the subject matter. Who in New York cares about the farmer, about wheat, about the price of bread and milk” (ix)?

The irony is that one of the play’s main concerns is that people should care and must know how the problems of the farmer create and add to the problems of workers in cities and consumers everywhere. The New York Times, however, reports otherwise, claiming that some cast members had “protested the inclusion of a scene featuring Earl

Browder, general secretary of the Communist Party” and that on the afternoon of the opening there was a meeting of The Federal Theatre Veteran’s League to protest that same scene. It is also reported, and confirmed by Morris Watson, that the stage manager for the show, Willis Browne, made a speech at the meeting, in which he called Watson a Communist and spoke out against the play. Watson immediately suspended him. At 7:30 that evening, a man who had been at the meeting tried unsuccessfully to buy a ticket to the show, caused some kind of undisclosed commotion and was arrested. During the show, a man was ejected for calling to the rest of the audience to sing “The Star Spangled Banner,” specifically during the much-anticipated scene featuring Earl Browder; and another man was removed for booing loudly, though apparently many people booed or cheered during the scene.

The production opened with an overture, as most Living Newspapers did, which led into an announcement from The Voice of the Living Newspaper, which provided the title of the show, and the location in time and title of the first scene: “1917 – Inflation” (9). The stage directions describe a scene “completely behind scrim” with a red spotlight casting the shadows of marching soldiers, farmers, another crowd, and three unnamed speakers. The action is reminiscent of agitprop, full of repetition in call-and-response format:

Woman: Farmer, save the nation!

First Speaker: The Boys in the Trenches need the men in the fields.

Woman: Farmer, save our boys!

Second Speaker: Every bushel of barley is a barrel of bullets.

Woman: Farmer, save democracy!

First speaker: Every hand with a spade is a hand-grenade.

-Federal Theatre Plays 10

Triple A Plowed Under uses allegorical characters named only Farmer 1, Country Banker, City Banker, and Worker, etc. along side representations of real senators, judges, and party officials to examine the history behind the economic catastrophe, beginning in 1917 and ending in February of 1936. We see these farmers lose everything when the war ends, the bank runs, the auctions of the farms that couldn't make payments, the effect on starving formerly-employed workers in cities, and the bureaucratic actions taken by Congress to pass and then repeal the Triple A. We hear the Supreme Court ruling on the Triple-A juxtaposed with excerpts from the minority report and speeches from Thomas Jefferson, Al Smith and Earl Browder. We see the reactions from the labor parties and the Farm Workers Unions.

The only characters given actual names in the entire script are those that are representations of real people. All of these named people speak dialogue that is footnoted throughout and taken from actual conversations with Hallie Flanagan, recorded in the Congressional Record, from actual press conferences or news reports.

The original production ended with three groups of people coming together on stage: farmers, women, and unemployed. These groups each engaged in their own call and response exercises with their leader, making the relationship between them clear by the

juxtaposition of their established needs. The Voice of the Living Newspaper then describes three news events “of that day” that are projected on the scrim. Those that were used in the first production were: the vote for establishing a Farmer-Labor Party, the acknowledgment given by a congressman that the farm and labor organizations have political power, and the Farmer’s Holiday Association endorsement of the Farmer-Labor Party. After these flashes of news footage, the group of farmers and the group of the unemployed call and respond to each other: “We *need* you. We *need* you. We need *you*. We need *you*.” The stage directions read, “Farmers and Unemployed jump close together with arms extended. Light on them is intensified...Tableaux of farmers, women, and unemployed hold. Curtain” (57).

The New York Times review praised the staging, the form, and the subject matter, but also mentioned that:

This hard-biting, necessarily sketchy but frequently brilliant review of the American farmer’s plight since the years of the World War violates one rule of a good newspaper story. It waxes editorial. It takes sides. It concludes by no uncertain implication that the farmer, the workingman and the middle-class consumer are victims of capitalist speculators – in other words, “the system.”

(The Play 16 May 1936)

Biased or not, the Living Newspapers were officially a hit. Ten days after *Triple A* closed, *1935* opened. A revue of the news events of 1935, including political, social, artistic, and scientific, the show was not nearly as strong as *Triple A Plowed Under*. The concept was to create a montage of those events that received the most media attention and

print space, a concept that is promising for two reasons. The first is that it allowed the audience to step back and take a look at the stories the press has been publishing, the second is that it exposes an overall timeline of the events leading up to the contemporary social situation that might have clarified the causal relationships between the headlines. Apparently, some of that was effected, for on May 19th Brooks Atkinson of the Times writes, “The history of our follies is harshly accented when the Living Newspaper boys pack it into an hour and a half of tabloid showmanship.” The same reviewer also comments on the irony of *Ethiopia*’s censorship in light of the harsh critique of the Nazis, Hitler, and the Olympic games debacle. “The current issue of the Living Newspaper attacks Nazi Germany with the freedom of editorial indignation that makes *Ethiopia* look like a tea table discussion.”

1935 ran for only two weeks before it closed, by far the shortest run of any Living Newspaper presented by the FTP. There are many factors that play into this, notably the mediocre quality of the writing and the discordant topics without a cohesive central theme. However, I think the most important factor was the show was a look back at events that had passed and things that were not directly related to events ongoing at the time the play opened – five months into the New Year. Living newspapers must engage the audience as agents of possible change if they are to be effective. In its flashback to the mistakes and misery of the year before, *1935* was simply abrasive material applied to a still healing wound.

The third Living Newspaper to run on the New York stage was *Injunction Granted*. It opened at the end of July 1936; one month after *1935* had closed. It ran in New York City for three months – an entire month longer than *Triple A Plowed Under*.

Injunction Granted was about labor, about strikes, wages, healthcare, and hours. It was about rights. But it was also about the history of labor in America and how it became the struggle that it was in the 1930s. There had been the huge textile workers' strike, the Minneapolis truckers strike, and the San Francisco general strike in 1934; then in 1935 the Committee for Industrial Organizing was formed to give a voice to all of those excluded by the AFL's craftsman focus; the fight was continuing into 1936 to get a minimum wage, safety standards, and overtime pay. This was a hot topic all over the country, and much more effective material than that provided by *1935*.

Injunction Granted's opening scene is set in England in the seventeenth century, where the audience witnesses a short montage of immigrants signing indentured servitude papers amidst unanswered questions and the promise of “freedom, bread, [and] an earthly paradise...” These indentured servants are welcomed to America in the next scene, where they are auctioned off for tobacco and rum. The third scene begins with The Voice of the Living Newspaper announcing the passing of the first labor law. It is read by a town crier and explains that skilled laborers cannot earn more than two shillings a day.

The play touches on distinctly American moments in time that highlight the ways that labor has been manipulated by those in power, including Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, Haymarket in 1886, and Pullman in 1894. Scene 15, approximately halfway through the mammoth script, is set at the factory of US Steel in 1919, and shows workers being

manipulated by their superiors at the company and tricked by a newspaper ad so that they break their own strike. Another scene, based on the Eugene V. Debs case features Supreme Court judges granting injunctions to break strikes and force workers back to their jobs. The following montage shows a number of well-known unions, and their bosses who have broken their strikes by twisting words. These are intertwined with statistics of the death and injury tolls of those strikes that weren't broken so easily. A ten-minute intermission allows the audience a brief break after the Sacco-Vanzetti case of 1921.

The second act continues to describe how labor is organized and the hurdles they had to jump over to get there. The show ends with an appeal to unionize; the final lengthy speech is given to an actor representing John L. Lewis, leader of the CIO, in which he accepts the challenge of the steel companies and pledges to stand for the rights of the “thirty million Americans that have been denied by industry and finance the privilege of collective organization.”

This is a powerful pro-labor play. The Federal Theatre Project was playing to an audience that was buying its seats for less than fifty cents a ticket. This was not a crowd of the upper crust. It was a new audience made up of those middle and blue-collar workers who were being courted by unions, who were populating the factories and the warehouses in New York City. These people were seeing their own history on stage, and receiving from it a better understanding of their place and their power within the industrial system.

The impact of the production is increased by the pace of the script, which never slows down. Its structure echoes Piscator's dedication to the tension that must be maintained through the climax of a play, the meta-theatrical techniques of Bertolt Brecht

which allow audiences to understand what is on stage is not a fantasy, but directly related to their real lives. That the agitprop delivery of a call to action – to join a union, to support the unions, to understand the workers that strike, is addressed to them.

According to Hallie Flanagan, both Ernst Toller and the *Variety* reviewer affirmed that the play is great in its “forcefulness and compression.” The contemporary reviews of the show were, however, mixed. for example, Brooks Atkinson in his review of the show on July 25th 1936, he states: “Even the theatre, which is a house of magic, cannot boil three centuries down to ninety minutes. But the Moscow stylization of writing and staging, which the Living Newspaper has adopted for this edition, reduces the long struggle to adolescent gibberish” (Rev. of *Injunction Granted*).

It is worth noting that Flanagan only mentions this play briefly, and only twice in *Arena* her memoir of the entire Federal Theatre Project. In light of the book’s purpose, which was to clear the Federal Theatre of Communist allegations, it is unsurprising that she would not dwell too long on one of the most propaganda filled plays that the project ever produced, but the lack of discussion is disappointing nonetheless.

Power by Arthur Arent sold over 60,000 tickets before it even opened at the Ritz Theatre in New York in February of 1937 (*Arena* 184). The play, as its title suggests, is about the cost of electricity, including how it is regulated and why it is so high. The play shows through projected illustrations, physical demonstrations, and allegorical scenes how the cost of electricity and allowed profits impact the audience’s electricity bills. Like those of *Triple A Plowed Under*, the only characters with names are historical people, and the rest go by allegorical titles like Consumer, Man, and Investor.

Immediately establishing the meta-theatricality of the piece, the first scene calls for the character of the production Stage Manager and House Manager, as well as a few electricians, as the power of the theatre itself is called into question and a “blackout” of the entire theatre’s power is required. The audience is by this method immediately engaged in a face-to-face encounter with their own stake in the problem being portrayed on stage. Lessons are given to the representative “consumer” who pays for power by the kilowatt-hour but has no idea what the jargon means or how the power is generated, regulated, or how the company itself decides the cost of the kilowatt-hour. The reviewer from the New York Times summed up the plot well when he said: “As crusaders for the people against industrial rapacity and inequity, the Living Newspaper lads are enormously able. The swift cyclorama of scenes tells the history of electricity in tabloid terms, simplifies such mysterious symbols as the kilowatt and the holding company, dramatizes the story of power in homely relation to the needs and frustrations of the average citizen and stops just short of a world revolution. Since the last edition the lads have acquired a mastery of narrative style” (The Play 2 Feb 1937). The scenes of this Living Newspaper are seamlessly woven together, alternating educational lessons with entertaining quips and heart-wrenching struggles of average Joes trying to figure out how to get access to and afford power. The play ends with a speech given by the Voice of the Living Newspaper explaining that the issue of government supplied power is to have a second chance in front of the Supreme Court, and listing all of those projects and regions that will be affected by the decision; the speech is immediately followed by the ensemble as a whole asking: “What will the Supreme Court do?” Their question is reinforced by a projection of a “huge

question mark” that remains projected as the house lights come up. The version published in the 1938 Random House collection ends with a note that explains that the ending of the play is subject to change when the news does, and the court decides the issue. It is just this sort of meaningful writing addressing current issues that kept the Living Newspaper’s houses full and the shows running all over the country.

One Third of a Nation was the third Living Newspaper performed by the FTP. It was written, rehearsed and performed during a six-week summer training camp for the Project’s best and brightest, chosen by each regional director, from every field: actors and directors of vaudeville, drama, and musical comedy; stagehands, lighting designers, writers, dancers, sound designers, costume designers and set painters. Everyone took part in everything – designers and directors acted and danced, dancers and actors built and painted sets, everyone sewed costumes and helped to put the text together. The show addressed the housing problem in New York City, and by proxy, the entire nation. Its run of 237 performances made it the most successful Living Newspaper in the Federal Theatre Project’s history (Himmelstein 105). The show was presented in FTP theatres all over the country, and each regional office rewrote the piece to reflect the specific statistics and problems in their area, keeping the piece as relevant as possible to the target audiences in every house.

The play, as published by Random House and presented by the FTP in New York City at the Adelphi Theatre from January 17th until October 22 1938, and later directed by yours truly at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Spring of 2008 (See Appendix), is decidedly non-realistic. The main character, Angus K. Buttonkooper, comes out of the

audience to “ask a few questions” and then travels back in time to see how housing and slum problems began. The first act concerns itself primarily with the formation and maintenance of the slum situation, from the very first prospectors who made their millions buying and developing land at the outskirts of town, to the legacy of generations of family-owned speculations that have made millions in profits. The scene illustrates the abstract idea of thousands of people living in overcrowded tenements by having twenty actors all squeeze together on a tiny rug.

The second act opens with the voice of the tenement itself addressing the audience to point out that despite all of the laws that have been and continue to be passed throughout the scene, the building remains unaltered. The protagonist then uses magic to make his guide from the first act reappear a hundred years after his death, at the prompting from the invisible and omnipotent Voice of the Living Newspaper. Scenes are juxtaposed to keep action going and to keep the audience engaged – one scene pulls at the heartstrings, the next will get laughs, the next aims to infuriate. The audience is treated to an exciting series of overlapping scenes that explore through representations of a large cross-section of cultural flavor all of the problems created by living in unclean, unsafe conditions provided by slums including marital strife, dead babies, cholera epidemics, shame, awkward family moments, exhaustion, crime, and violence. The second act also explores the laws that have been passed and ignored, the acts of Congress that have begun to address the issue, and the funding available for housing projects. The overall effect is that the audience wants to join in with the characters at the end, to “holler. And keep on hollering until they admit in Washington that it’s just as important to keep a man alive as it is to kill him” (*One Third of*

a Nation 120). With a cast of 167 characters that are mostly onstage only for a moment before being swallowed by a crowd scene or a brief blackout and a complete change in either physical location or time, the width of the play's historical lens is amazing. This play perfectly illustrates what Laura Browder explains in her book, *Rousing the Nation*: "The Living Newspapers tend to be less concerned with the question of how a given individual will survive or discover a meaningful identity for himself than with how America as a nation will at least survive and at best flourish" (123).

Spirochete, written by Arnold Sundgaard, was one of the few Living Newspapers that had its first production outside New York. The play debuted on the Blackstone Theatre stage in Chicago on April 29th, 1938. This play spans over four hundred years of research into the origins, causes, detection, effects and cure of syphilis. The main protagonist is The Patient; a poor man who suffers from the disease and who magically lives throughout the entire play. He visits each researcher and doctor that has contributed to the knowledge and treatment of syphilis as he makes his discovery, commenting on the action for the benefit of the audience. The script moves quickly, includes all the great hooks and humor that the best history teachers know are indispensable, and manages to engage rather than repulse the audience. It was received well by the press and the Chicago Government praised the play as well, citing it as an aid to their ongoing campaign against the disease (Flanagan 144).

Unfortunately, *Spirochete* was the last Living Newspaper ever presented by the Federal Theatre Project. The FTP and the Living Newspaper did not fail. They continued

to draw a steady audience until the very end. The death of the Living Newspaper was not caused by a lack of interest or because it was not responding to a need, but rather, that need was being met too well. The Project had a number of new Living Newspapers in progress across the country that are not listed in the productions list of Flanagan's memoir, including the Los Angeles branch's *Spanish Grant* which explored farm labor and racism in that community, another Chicago branch play entitled *Townsend Goes to Town*, which explored pensions, *Stars and Bars* which was written by Ward Courtney with the cooperation of the FTP Negro Unit and candidly addressed the civil rights issue in language far ahead of its time. Yet another Living Newspaper that had yet to see the stage was *Liberty Deferred*, written by the Negro Unit of the FTP and discussing the institution of slavery and its lasting effects. Other Living Newspapers in progress across the country when the FTP was suddenly struck dead include *War and Taxes*, *Rivers Flood*, *Russia*, *The Ten Million*, *King Cotton*, and *Dirt*.

“Had it not been for the abrupt termination of its grants and the distraction caused by the Second World War, the Living Newspaper could have become a highly effective political theatre” (Bradby109). It was not a communist theatre, not a socialist theatre, but a theatre that examined those issues, those problems and those taboo topics that were affecting the lives of its audience everyday. It presented the issues for the benefit of those audiences – not for the government, not for the President, not for America as a nation, but for the people that make up the country, vote for the president, and supply the power.

The political climate of 1939 was explosive. Allegations were flying through the headlines: “The Federal Theatre is dominated by Communists,” and “Every play is sheer propaganda for Communism or the New Deal.” The House of Un-American Activities committee hearings, led by Senator Dies, took testimony from many people, the majority of whom gave fraudulent testimony or spoke about irrelevant topics rather than on legitimate issues. The hearings were cut short when most of the evidence collected was proved to be inaccurate, but that wasn’t enough to save the project. In 1939, the joint House and Senate appropriations committee came up with a compromise bill that cut the FTP, and on June 30, 1939, in the midst of amazing success and undoubted promise the Federal Theatre Project was suddenly put to death (Williams 242-3).

Chapter Three Modern Incarnations

A. Augusto Boal's Methods of Newspaper Theatre

Augusto Boal is a Brazilian theatre practitioner who began developing the system called Theatre of the Oppressed in the 1970s. TO is not a system of acting, nor one of indoctrination, it is a toolbox for people who wish to create democratic social change, in any country, with any group. I have seen his work done to tackle large social oppressions like sexism and homelessness and smaller more personal oppressions like coping with the demands of a theatre student's schedule. The source of the work's power is that the form allows each individual to express, rehearse, and revise their problem and their reactions to it in a "rehearsal for real life," so that even large issues are tackled in the individual's everyday life. Not all of Boal's methods are relevant to this study, I will therefore focus on what Boal calls, conveniently enough, Newspaper theatre.

According to Boal, there are at least eleven methods included in this genre, most of which are familiar to contemporary audiences – though they may not recognize them as newspaper theatre. The first method, "The Simple Reading" is based on the same needs that the original living newspapers filled, but with a more complex intent. The simple reading removes the news item from whatever context it was placed in within the news source – the front page of the city paper, last page of a conservative newsletter, the arts section of a liberal weekly, the two-minute segment on a cheesy morning talk show – and

allows it to exist on its own merit. This can add or subtract importance, but it is meant to allow the audience to judge the information without the commentary of the layout or publisher.

The second method is the complementary reading, which adds missing information to complete the context of a news story. In *Legislative Theatre* Boal uses a political poster as an example: “‘If you love liberty, vote for Stroeser.’ And it was the truth, but only half of the truth...” and he goes on to describe a violated copy of the poster where someone had written the rest of the information, “because if you don’t, the police will come looking for you in your home” (Boal 239).

The third method is one that can be seen quite frequently in the FTP Living Newspapers and many earlier agitprops as well as in satirical news shows. This is the crossed reading, in which news stories that depict two seemingly opposite stories are juxtaposed to show their relationship. In the class on Boal that I am teaching this semester, one of my students has designed a crossed reading piece that juxtaposes photos of our female celebrities on shopping sprees and visits to entertain the troops with stories and photos of real women in African militias to explore the disparity in the “female experience.”

The fourth method is the rhythmic reading, which uses many of the techniques familiar in blockbuster musicals – put a speech about the war to a soft-shoe number, or the State of the Union address to a tango or to the tune of “The Star Spangled Banner” and the glittering generalities and logical fallacies tend to expose themselves almost as quickly as the audience breaks into laughter.

The reinforced reading, the fifth method, involves turning the oppressor's own advertising slogans and propaganda against them by again using juxtaposition and contrast with an opposing story. Perhaps reading testimony describing the torture taking place in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prison camps, and in between each snippet of testimony, actors could alternately say the pledge of allegiance (with emphasis on "with liberty and justice for all") or sing "My Country 'Tis of Thee," or maybe even read excerpts from the President's speeches promising freedom and democracy, or describing the crimes of Saddam Hussein.

Method number six is the parallel action, like the crossed reading and the reinforced reading; it again uses juxtaposition to point out flaws and inconsistencies. This method specifically uses physical action in contrast to the verbally delivered news item. This is very useful in those instances where the old maxim "do as I say and not as I do" can be applied. Boal's example is, "A text which appears to be revolutionary is read against a background of scenes of the literary salon, revealing the lack of sincerity behind the words" (242).

The historical reading, the seventh method, is another device commonly employed by the FTP Living Newspapers. This method involves framing a news story, like the current war in Iraq, with the historical parallels, like all of the previous wars in Iraq, to show the patterns that exist within the global or historical context. The goal is to provide those alternatives that have been used before or are currently being used, not necessarily for the purposes of emulation, but to learn from those things that have been done by others, both good and not so good.

Improvisation is the eighth technique. It is not a special form or specifically long-or short-form improv that Boal endorses, just improvisation in its purest form. Any topic can be explored and many in-depth discussions begun by an improvisation on a relevant topic. One of the many strengths of this format is that there is no imposed solution or design – it is simply a forum for expression and for discovery.

The ninth method is the concentration of abstraction. This method is used to break down the ways in which we as audiences are desensitized to the news and to the world around us. It is a way of making the abstract and distant into the immediate and concrete. Props are an effective tool in this method, as are large-scale demonstrations of the kind used in thetruth.com videos and television ads. This ad, available to view at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJTCWtcAews&feature=related> is one example of the effectiveness of the concentration of abstraction method.

The tenth and eleventh methods are “text out of context” and “insertion into the actual context.” The tenth method is one very often employed by late-night talk show hosts – they take the serious news and twist it into hilarious moments of dark humor that make us laugh while we admit the flaws that the method exposes in our society. One skit from the March 18 2008 episode of the Jon Stewart show, demonstrates the principle in reference to former New York Governor Elliott Spitzer’s prostitution scandal. Stewart introduced a new segment entitled “The Govs must be Horny” in order to clear the air about all of the “governor kink rather than suffer through a slow trickle” of confessions and days of never-ending network news feeding frenzies.

The last method that Boal describes in *Legislative Theatre* is “insertion into context.” This is meant to take away the narrow focus of those that aim to blame an event on a specific person or circumstance and open the lens to the other factors that have contributed to the problem, other cases, victims, and people or policies at fault. This is what the FTP Living Newspapers did best – they took the widest possible angle through space and time to find all of the contributing factors responsible for current situations, thus allowing their audiences to understand the true nature of the problem being explored in all of its complexity.

B. Legitimate News

I watch CNN on mornings that I have time for a second cup of coffee. I get the Sunday New York Times delivered. I get political headlines delivered via email every weekday. My Internet browser’s homepage is set to MSN.com. So I see the news regularly. I see the newscasters casually bantering with their financial and entertainment correspondents while they neglect to give updates on civil wars around the world, genocide and AIDS crises in Africa, the daily slaughtering in South America, strikes in Europe, and the continued quagmire that is the Iraq conflict. I see perfectly made-up newscasters playing their television persona on daily shows arranged in sitcom-like blocks to appeal to the target audience of the hour. I, as a theatre scholar, relentlessly analyze the theatricality in every segment and critically rip them apart or laugh knowingly when I catch them in a theatrical device. The news has become its own form of theatre.

Obviously this applies to the network and 24-hour news stations rather clearly – they are in constant competition for ratings and viewers and use every means possible to beat out the other guys. They use all of the technical trappings of newspaper theatre, and they use them well. Think of the last newscast you saw. It almost certainly was in short, episodic format, probably switching between each scene from the good-looking-middle-aged-male-in-a-suit news anchor to the pretty-but-conservatively-dressed-female news anchor; there were colorful graphics to replace the projections and a news ticker at the bottom of your screen to replace the tele-type, and film clips, cuts to foreign or national correspondents and video conference calls with experts and senators to replace multiple actors in varying locales. But as Boal points out when he discusses subverting context, this dramatic reading of the news applies to print media as well. Newspaper theatre, after all, developed from a print medium originally, as its name still implies. Headlines are headlines, and placement still counts. The story that catches your eye, the language, the color, font size, and space allotted to each article tell the audience which order the scenes go in, how important each scene is in relation to the others. Depending on the order, the stories may be juxtaposed in a way that allows the audience to clearly interpret the world around them, or they can skew the interpretation of the information that they provide.

I visited the Foxnews.com to see what they were reporting and how it was presented, and to test my theory. This is what I saw:

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UREPORT Send us your video, photos and news

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 Children moved to new shelter
 State frees 139 women seized in raid on Texas compound; moms decry previous treatment of 416 youths in custody

Cleric: 'Islam Will Conquer Rome'
 Hamas member's sermon openly declares 'the capital of the Catholics, or the Crusader capital,' will soon be conquered

• Israel Turns Deaf Ear to 'Communicator' Carter
 • Israel Reportedly Offered Hamas a Truce in Gaza Strip

Historic Hook-Up
 A Cuban woman learns how to work her new cell phone in Havana; customers flooded stores after President Raul Castro allowed cellular service for the first time in Cuba.

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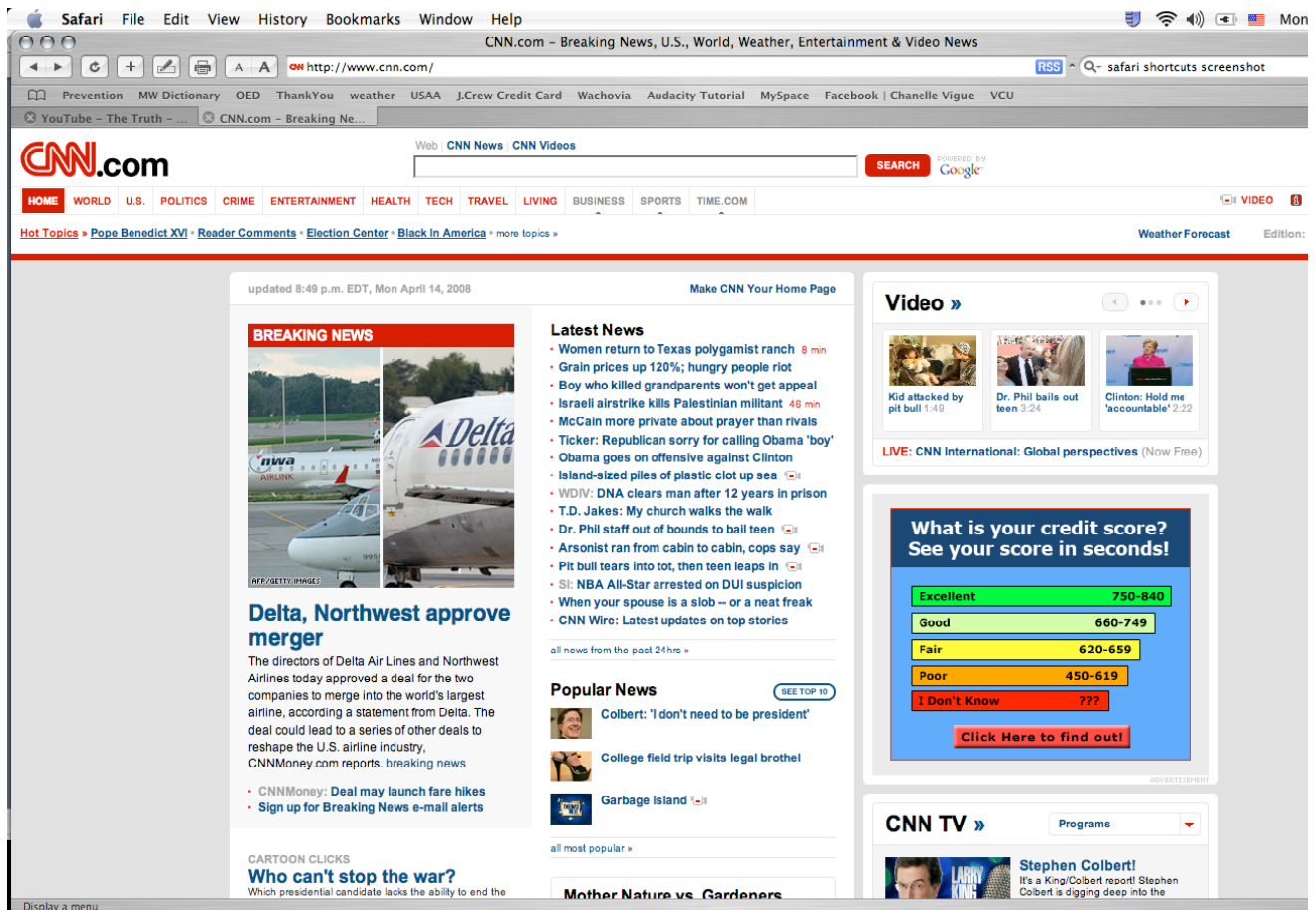
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 Common Sense
 Lessons to be learned from Couric and Clinton

All you have to do is look at the font sizes, the language, the choices made as to which news brief got the top billing and it is clear that our “legitimate” news media doesn’t even take itself very seriously. “Obama eases up on Hill, Turns attacks on Mac” sounds less like a news brief and more like a gossip blog or a sports highlight reel. “Historic Hook Up” sounds less like a nation is finally allowed cellular access and more like it was caught in bed with its mortal enemy on a rerun of “Desperate Housewives.” The one story that is

on a somewhat serious matter is in a smaller, lower headline that is worded to evoke fear, threatening and biased from the get go, not to mention the immediate quote that is taken completely out of context from the middle of a sentence and from an unnamed source.

To be fair, I checked out the CNN.com website to see if they were doing any better:



Other than the news about an airline merger, there is very little news indeed.

Because it has a picture and more space devoted to it, my eye skips directly to the Popular News, which is led off by an article on a comedy news show host, Stephen Colbert. The first video is a reject from America's most violent home videos: footage of a pit bull

attack. The list of recent news is an unorganized, undiscerning mess that gives the reader no indication of how to read the stories or which, if any of them, is important at all.

Looking at this page I begin to see holes in the coverage. So Obama is critiquing McCain, who is more private about his religion than both Obama and Hillary...but what about their policies? Speeches? Personal histories? Senate voting records? What about the information that is important to me as a voter rather than as a consumer of entertainment?

My first try with print newspapers was not as hopeless as I expected:

The screenshot shows the New York Times website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like HOME PAGE, MY TIMES, TODAY'S PAPER, VIDEO, MOST POPULAR, and TIMES TOPICS. The main header displays "The New York Times" and "Today's Paper" for Monday, April 14, 2008. A search bar is located on the right. Below the header, there's a section for "The Times in Print for April 14, 2008" with links to different sections like Front Page, International, National Report, etc. The main content area features several articles under the heading "THE FRONT PAGE". The first article is "Co-Payments Go Way Up for Drugs With High Prices" by Gina Kolata, discussing health insurance companies asking patients to pay hundreds of dollars for prescriptions. The second article is "Housing Woes in U.S. Spread Around Globe" by Mark Landler, mentioning Ireland and India. The third article is "In U.S., an Uncertain Church Awaits the Pope" by Laurie Goodstein, about the pope's arrival in the United States. Below these are sections for "CAIRO JOURNAL" with the headline "A City Where You Can't Hear Yourself Scream" and "Union Killings Peril Trade Pact With Colombia". On the right side, there's a "Today's Headlines Daily E-Mail" sign-up section and a large advertisement for "The Weekender" (Friday, Saturday, Sunday). At the bottom, there's a "Quotation of the Day" and a "Podcast: Front Page" section.

I can tell from this listing of front-page stories that our nation is one of many in the global economy, though our national stories do come first and there are more of them. Its an interesting read on the nation's priorities: Healthcare, Housing/Economy, Religion, Human interest and World News, and then Economy. I think it may only be because of the New York Times' special relationship to the theatre community, but there is even an advertisement for a theatrical event. The headlines are still worded to attract as much interest as possible, and their first line teasers are over-simplified generalizations that give very little actual information. Also, there is no information about the ongoing war.

Next, I tried USA Today:

File Edit View History Bookmarks Window Help

News, Travel, Weather, Entertainment, Sports, Technology, U.S. & World - USATODAY.com

http://www.usatoday.com/

Marketplace Jobs Cars Real Estate Shop Subscriber Services

Click to personalize your forecast

Home News Travel Money Sports Life Tech Weather

Search Stories, photos, and more

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powered by YAHOO!

04/14/2008 - Updated 09:18 PM ET

Reader comment by kate

I think if you check, we get most of our oil from Canada and Mexico. Iraq supplies very little ...

Go to this story

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What's this?

Essentials Markets Scores Politics Games Lotteries Video Photos Subscribe Reader Services Blogs Site Index

Headlines | Most popular | News blog

energy | Comments 195 | Recommend 13

Gas prices keep climbing

election2008 | Comments 816 | Recommend 29

Obama and McCain square off

housing | Comments 303 | Recommend 37

Poll: Housing pessimism growing

news | Comments 117 | Recommend 47

'Harry Potter' author testifies

Across the USA

washington | Comments 295 | Recommend 127

Big names owe big-time on taxes

By Dennis Cauchon, USA TODAY

The IRS estimates 21% of federal individual income taxes go unpaid each year - about \$300 billion last year.

• MORE: Tax delinquents encounter varying outcomes

nation | Comments 35 | Recommend 6

Spokesman: Polygamist women back at ranch

The state has returned 139 women who were staying at a shelter with their children back to the Yearning For Zion ranch.

• CUSTODY: Sed investigation moving to courtroom

Politics

news | Comments 336

GOP congressman refers to Obama as 'that boy'

Kentucky lawmaker now says it was a "poor

World's largest airline: Delta says it will merge with NWA

By Ted S. Warren, AP

flights | Comments 13 | Recommend 5

• ON DEADLINE: Delta, NWA merger could spur others

Market summary

Latest Market Numbers

Index	Last	Change	% change	YTD
DOW	12,307.06	-23.36	-0.19%	-7.26%
NASDAQ	2,275.82	-14.42	-0.63%	-14.19%
S&P 500	1,328.32	-4.51	-0.34%	-9.54%

Quotes as of 4:03 PM ET

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Only on USA TODAY

ONPOLITICS

This one is much more focused on the economy: Airline merger, market summary, and gas prices are the first three stories I see. Then its back to the network news games of catching the attention of an attention-deficit disordered readership with reports on celebrities and slander. It is also completely focused on American events and perspectives – there is very little concern with the global community and absolutely no mention of the war that is consuming our military resources and a large portion of our national budget.

The Fox news webpage and the New York Time front page are the best examples of the contextualizing and ranking of news stories that Boal discusses subverting in his theatre practices. Add to this the competition for patronage, viewers and subscriptions and it's not hard to understand why they do it, either. Even when the media is attempting to present the fair and balanced version of a story, we must understand that every story is a victim of what comes before and after it, and that how it is presented, by whom and for who will always make some kind of statement.

Which brings me to my favorite news sources: Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert.

C. Comedy News Media:

I get more current events news from The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and The Colbert Report than anywhere else. Part of that is because they are the only news shows entertaining enough to justify recording them on my DVR, but I also get more perspective from those shows than I do anywhere else. I am not alone in this point of view. In fact, “‘The Daily Show’ now attracts more 18- to 34-year-old viewers than the network news. And the 13-minute CNN segment with Mr. Stewart has been downloaded or streamed from

the Internet more than 1.5 million times, surpassing the viewership of ‘Crossfire’ itself” (Cave 24 Oct 2004). And after a confrontation with Bill O’Reilly, a rival conservative host on a legitimate news show, research done by more than one organization found that the audience of the “Daily Show” was not only more likely to know the issues and be able to identify leaders and other officials; they are also more likely to have a college education, be employed as a “professional, owner or manager,” and make more money (Pew Research Center website).

Knowledge Levels by News Source					
	High knowledge group*	-----Selected knowledge items-----			
		Name Sunnis	Identify Libby	Identify Putin	US deaths in Iraq
	%	%	%	%	%
Nationwide	35	32	29	36	55
<i>The audience of...</i>					
Daily Show/Colbert Report	54	50	44	52	59
Major newspaper websites	54	52	42	58	64
NewsHour with Jim Lehrer	53	46	45	54	67
O'Reilly Factor	51	43	44	53	64
National Public Radio	51	49	43	51	66
Rush Limbaugh's radio show	50	40	42	52	70
News magazines	48	44	41	49	60
TV news websites	44	47	35	47	60
Local daily newspaper	43	36	35	43	60
News from Google, Yahoo, etc.	41	44	33	44	60
CNN	41	38	36	41	60
Network evening news	38	31	33	37	61
Online news discussion blogs	37	35	32	36	57
Fox News Channel	35	32	29	38	58
Local TV news	35	30	30	35	57
Network morning shows	34	30	30	35	57
* Entries show the percentage of regular viewers, readers or listeners of each outlet who fall in the high knowledge group (correctly answered at least 15 of 23 questions about politics & world affairs) and the percent who correctly answered some of the individual questions on the test.					

Both “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” and “The Colbert Report” use the juxtaposition of the actual footage of an event or the reporting of an event with, in most cases, a prior event or series of events that highlights the ridiculousness of or discrepancies

within the most current event. While there are moments that allow Stewart or Colbert to simply editorialize by inserting comments throughout the footage or just editing the footage itself, even that act takes the event out of the context of regular news media. In the following section, I have chosen examples that highlight new or especially effective devices or techniques.

But first, a little background: as described on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* official website, the show consists of:

One anchor, five correspondents, zero credibility. If you're tired of the stodginess of the evening newscasts and you can't bear to sit through the spinmeisters and shills on the 24-hour cable news network, don't miss The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, the nightly half-hour series unburdened by objectivity, journalistic integrity or even accuracy. The Emmy and Peabody Award-winning Daily Show takes a reality-based look at news, trends, pop culture, current events, politics, sports and entertainment with an alternative point of view. In each show, anchorman Jon Stewart and a team of correspondents, including Aasif Mandvi, John Oliver, Rob Riggle, Jason Jones and Samantha Bee, comment on the day's stories, employing actual news footage, taped field pieces, in-studio guests and on-the-spot coverage of important news events. The Daily Show with Jon Stewart -- it's even better than being informed. (www.TheDailyShow.com)

The format is one that not only gives Stewart all the characters he needs, as each correspondent plays whomever is needed that day, but also an excellent platform from which to comment on the cable news format itself. It is mostly satiric skits, all in short formats, in a consistent layout, which includes a few constant segments like “Moment of Zen” and a nightly guest interview. It is partially the interviews that give both Stewart’s and Colbert’s shows their authenticity. Jon Stewart regularly features Senators, Governors, legitimate news personalities, (even former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recently appeared on both shows), and brave Presidential candidates are even known to stop in on occasion. However, authenticity also comes from the fearlessness with which Stewart digs his hilariously critical claws into not just the president, other government officials, and his fellow newscasters – even on occasion, himself – not only to get a laugh but to give the audience a moment of thought, or a dose of perspective.

I will begin with Jon Stewart’s critique of the media after former Governor Spitzer’s ironic fall from grace. Elliott Spitzer was known as a super-boy scout type that was elected on a platform that promised to do away with crime in the state of New York. So when his own frequent trips to an upscale prostitution outlet were made public, the irony attracted a large dose of media attention. After a quip about how the press “just thought that yesterday would just be another day spent feigning interest in the concerns of regional voters,” and singing a line from “Tomorrow” from *Annie* to express the joy the press felt when given the gift of scandal, he cuts to a video montage including a few seconds of full screen clips from every network news program – all saying the exact same thing. The montage cuts directly back to Stewart, wearing an oversized bib with a cutout

picture of Elliott Spitzer on it, and pounding a knife and fork on his desk and miming taking bites of an invisible meal as he growls “Johnny hungry, Johnny want Spitzer!” The live audience laughs, and he pauses to let them catch up with him, then removes his bib, smiles coyly, and then goes back to his mock-serious newscaster role. We are introduced immediately to a correspondent who has more on the story, videoconference called in from Albany or at least a backdrop that looks like the Governor’s mansion. In this segment, Stewart makes fun of the press, the system of circling buzzards that wait greedily for heroes to fall; but he includes himself in that category, not only with his symbolic eating of Spitzer’s imaginary flesh, but by immediately cutting back to traditional newscast format (“The Daily Show” 11 March 2008).

Another recent moment that shows off the effectiveness of this new newspaper theatre medium is a segment from the March 20th 2008 show, which takes a moment to reflect on the five-year anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. A colorful and rather abstract graphic pops on the screen to the left of Stewart’s head as he begins in a voice that conveys fond memories, “Hard to believe, folks, its been five years...and they said it wouldn’t last.” Then switching to a serious and slightly angry tone, “No. Seriously, They said it wouldn’t last!” which begins a series of cuts to network news footage of Vice President Cheney and Former Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld in which they say that the war would not last even six months. Cut back to Stewart who responds to the footage with, “Missed it by...”as he pulls out a pair of oversized white plastic gloves attached to sticks, and spreads the plastic hands as far from each other as possible...then sees that even that is not enough “...arhhg!” Then he bends white glove into giant rude gesture before

putting the props back under his desk. He cuts to another montage, which he narrates, of the most ridiculous of all of the anti-war protests going on that day including “Barbie’s first anti-war bedroom set, and the foul-mouthed polar bear of truth...and even a community theatre mock interrogation in front of the white house.” That last one was not ironic or sarcastic, and he lets the CSPAN footage of the performance speak for itself before he makes fun of those performers as well. His segue way is chilling: “But no matter what the American people think, one think is certain. It doesn’t matter!” This refers to his next news clip, this one again of Cheney from March 19th 2008: the Vice President is confronted with the information that two-thirds of the American people are against the war and his response is: “So?” Cut back to Stewart who portrays unveiled disbelief before cutting back to the same interview.

“Reporter: You don’t care what the American people think?”

Cheney: No, I think you cannot be...blown off course by the fluctuations in the public opinion polls.” Stewart grabs this tidbit and immediately juxtaposes it with a clip of Cheney justifying the so-called progress in Iraq by citing as his reliable source “public opinion polls.” The segment continues.

The above are all classic newspaper theatre techniques: using text and dialogue from authentic transcripts or film footage to show the inconsistencies of policies and people in power, quick transitions from scene to scene, and humorous interludes between segments that inform the audience of serious circumstances.

The Daily Show’s right-wing rhetoric infused spin-off, The Colbert Report, starring long-time Daily show correspondent, Stephen Colbert, in a self-titled long-term character.

Stephen Colbert was poised to make television and linguistic history on October 17th, 2005 with the premiere of his own show, “The Colbert Report.” It was on that first episode that Stephen coined the word “truthiness,” which went on to become Merriam-Webster's 2006 Word of the Year.

Almost immediately, Stephen's fan base increased exponentially and demanded to know more about their icon, and thus, rabid fan site Colbert Nation was born. It wasn't long before Stephen had a Hungarian bridge named after him and an ice cream flavor created in his honor (Official Colbert Report website).

Colbert has a lengthy and impressive biography in comedy, surpassed only by his on-screen character's ego and self-infatuation. The set is decorated with his name in every place it would fit, and a portrait of himself standing next to a portrait of himself standing next to a portrait of himself is hanging above the fireplace in front of which he interviews his guests. His format is very much taken from the Daily Show's example, though Colbert has made his show his own.

Colbert's character is purely satiric. He embodies everything that the right-wing admires – to the point of exposing every logical fallacy, overused slogan, prejudice, and entitlement without mercy. His is a new take on the agitprop's cartoon capitalist; he is the cartoon right-wing party-line loyalist. He wears his crisp navy blue or black suits, hair perfectly parted and shiny, and revels in his position as a wealthy-middle-class-Catholic-white-male in modern America. His character, before he even gets a hold of juicy news items to satirize, is choc full of witty commentary. He takes it upon himself to make up

words as needed, order about his fan organization, “The Colbert Nation,” to commit pranks and spread disinformation via Wikipedia. As of April 30 2008, both he and Jon Stewart are finalists for the top five spots in Time Magazine’s 2008 100 Most Influential People list. Colbert even made a run for President in the South Carolina primary earlier this year.

Colbert’s show centers on segments with title like “Tip of the Hat, Wag of the Finger,” “The Word,” and “The Threat Down.” In one of the most effective recently aired Tip of the Hat skits, Colbert played an excerpt from a real conference call that the President had with a group of U.S. troop stationed in Afghanistan. In the excerpt, the President said, “I must say, I’m a little envious. If I were slightly younger and not employed here, I think it would be a fantastic experience to be out on the front lines, helping this young democracy succeed. It must be exciting for you... it must be romantic, in some ways, you know, confronting danger.” The shot immediately cuts back to Colbert who has

...No choice but to give a wag of my finger to our troops in Afghanistan. Soldiers! Shame on you for arousing our President’s envy! You must stop making multiple tours of duty battling fierce militias in a barren foreign land look like so much fun! While you’re running around romantically dodging roadside bombs and rounding up potential terrorists, the President is stuck back here in the White House pushing glazed salmon around his dinner plate and pretending to pay attention while Condi plays the piano...Stop enticing the President! We could lose him again! Remember what happened the last time he got excited about a war: he ran off to join

the Alabama National Guard and then nobody could find him. (19 March 2008)

While Colbert is speaking, graphics that show the troops completing missions are flipped with an image of the President in his Nation Guard Uniform. Colbert keeps a straight face and stays in character throughout the skit, though he does sneak a half smile in the transition to the next segment. By embracing his over the top character, Colbert has become an incredibly effective commentator in our currently Republican-led times. It is one thing to say, as Stewart might have, something along the lines of ‘Romantic? Are you kidding me?’ And another, more effective thing to take the opposite tactic and to support without question the most vapid of the President’s quotations and then take them one step further.

Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart have both put out bestselling books that are extensions of the theatrical news styles for which they have become so popular. Stewart’s book *America (The Book): A Citizens Guide to Democracy Inaction* takes the form of an American history textbook, but it is truly a newspaper theatre piece about the problems inherent in textbooks and the educational curriculum in the American education system. It employs many of the Newspaper theatre techniques laid out in this paper to subvert that which the audience thinks they know and widen their understanding of our nation’s current state of affairs by pointing out all of those areas of our government which have changed from what they once were into something less wholesome, more media driven, and corrupt on many levels.

Stephen Colbert's *I Am America (And So Can You!)* uses the same methods, but as all things Colbert, from a place of extreme satire. Filled with satiric images that are all too true, side notes placed in the margin that comment directly on the text, and ridiculous charts and graphs that prove even more ridiculous points, the book takes everything the right-wing contingent of our country stands for and flips on its head. The chapter I find most interesting is on Hollywood, which called the age of the blacklist, an "even Golden Age," and includes a section on the HUAC hearings in which Colbert writes, "One of my greatest regrets is that I didn't get to 'name names.' And I would have named enough names to fill the Moscow phone book. Luckily I do have the opportunity to *rename* some names that were named all those years ago. So here they are, a collection of blacklisted comrades who were stopped from destroying our nation right in the nick of time" (Colbert 138). As seen from even this short excerpt, the typography and the language used are theatrical. In the sidebar next to this quote is a picture of a rodent, under which is written, "Tried without jury." The next page is a full-page chart titled "America-Haters who were brought to Justice by the HUAC Blacklist" and contains photos and bad puns about Burl Ives, Judy Holiday, and David Robinson, among others.

Conclusion

Newspaper theatre has a rich history as a political theatre tool in subverting information. Through the use juxtaposition, satire, recreating and removing context, and reappropriating information that is presented by those in power, newspaper theatre allows its audience to evaluate the presented situation from a much broader view, incorporating the historical nuances and an understanding of the larger forces at work. This ideal perspective throws light on the fact that each audience member has the ability to act in order to change the way that things are, as they are (again, ideally) able understand that the current situation is but a byproduct of changeable circumstances. As it promotes understanding, knowledge as power, and the individual's ability to act for his own interests, it is a powerful political and social tool.

The newspaper theatre form continues to develop and expand its techniques as we develop new technologies like YouTube, blogs, and social networking websites, which were not touched on in this study. As information becomes more readily available the focus has switched from spreading information to sorting and interpreting the overwhelming and often misguiding mounds of information that to which the modern citizen is subjected.

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APPENDIX A

See separate file “Waiting for Lefty 2008”

APPENDIX B

See separate file “Two-Thirds of a Nation 2008”

APPENDIX C

THEA 491: BOAL (And Beyond)

Spring 2008
 Location: PAC B72
 Time: T/TR 2-4pm
 Instructor: Chanelle Vigue

Office: Shafer St. Playhouse 304
 Office Hours: Wednesday 1-7pm
 Phone: **(10a-10p!)** 804-514-6274
 E-mail: viguecr@vcu.edu

Course Description and Goals:

This class will be what you make it. Our class time will be spent doing the training work described in your reading as an ensemble, discussing the theories in the readings and adapting them to our community. We will devise new works using our adaptations of the theory and the training. The readings (30-40 pgs/week) are integral to the work, and having a working knowledge of them is necessary to being an active member of the ensemble.

In this course you will learn about Augusto Boal's life and contributions to theatre in order to apply these principles to our own community. We will focus on issues and problems within our community that we have or are affected by in our day-to-day lives. Together, through our ensemble explorations, devised works, and performances, we will work towards an understanding of our place and power as citizen-artists within the community. I hope that these experiences will also build a more thorough knowledge and appreciation of our own and each other's value systems.

By the end of this course you will know:

- Who Augusto Boal is and what his contributions to theatre have been.
- The basic theories behind Augusto Boal's work, including Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
- The forms, goals, and vocabulary of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO).
- Many games, warm-ups, and exercises that can be applied to all types of theatre.

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Work as an ensemble member to understand, analyze, adapt, and create work based in TO
- Prepare, write, and perform theatre forms in the arsenal of the TO.
- Teach and lead warm-ups and games from TO to a group.
- Joker a forum theatre piece.

Required Text:

Course Pack (AVAILABLE ON BLACKBOARD)

Games for actors and Non-Actors by Augusto Boal (\$40, @VBC)

Recommended Reading:

Augusto Boal by Francis Babbage

The Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal

Rainbow of Desire by Augusto Boal

Legislative Theatre by Augusto Boal

Attendance:

1. Attendance is very important to this class – ensemble work is not ensemble work if we are not all here.

2. Two late arrivals = One Absence

3. Each absence after the first two will lower your final grade by one letter.

4. Arriving more than ten (10) minutes late for class counts as an absence.

* IF you intend to observe any religious holidays you must let me know by FEB 5*

Dress Code:

The Theatre VCU dress code for studio classes will be followed in this course.

Communication:

E-mail is considered a valid form of communication – please check your VCU email account and Blackboard page regularly to make sure you don't miss anything.

Grades:

1. Participation and Preparedness: 20%

Attendance, attitude in class, willingness/readiness to participate in ensemble work, devising, and discussions, as well as completing/turning in assignments on time.

2. Peer Evaluations: 20%

As members of our ensemble, you will each evaluate the participation and preparedness of each other at midterm and at the end of the semester. The average of the scores your peers give you will count as your grade.

3. Leading Games: 10%

You will be responsible for leading/joking the class in a number of warm-ups and games from your textbook– these specific exercises and due dates will be decided in class.

4. Journals: 20%

Journals will be turned in online between 5pm Thursday and midnight Friday throughout the semester. Entries should reflect your understanding of the course reading, discussions, and work in class.

5. Performance Reaction Papers:

20%

After any performance, each ensemble member will write a 3-5 (5-7 for 791) page paper describing the experience. Did the performance go as planned? What happened that you did/did not expect? Why do you think that happened? What was the result of the performance? What was the response from the audience? Why? Other thoughts?

6. Final Paper:

1

0%

Each ensemble member will write a 5-10 page paper (10-15 for 791) that reflects on how this course has impacted their thinking and action as individuals, theatre artists, and on their work both now and in the future.

Dates to Remember:

END OF ADD/DROP: JAN 20

MATC: FEB 28 – MARCH 2

SETC: MARCH 5-9

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 9-16

LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW: MARCH 21

Assignments:

Week 1:

1/15: Good Day, Cat and Mouse, The Cross and the Circle, Colombian Hypnosis V1, Course Overview, syllabus and course goals, Circle of Knots.

1/17: Read: Handout on Boal

American Football V2, Colombian Hypnosis V2&3, Minimum Surface Contact, Pushing Against Each Other v1-4, Lecture: Who is Boal? + Handout, Assign Games
Slow Motion Race.

Week 2:

1/22: **Games: Table of contents, Translator's intro, Preface 1&2, and Ch 1 (vii-28)**

Stick in the Mud, Walks: Crab, Monkey, All fours, Camel, Elephant, 3legged, leaning against, wheelbarrow, as you like it. Discuss reading, Wooden Sword.

1/24: Circle of Names..., Gravity Series, Discuss reading & exercises, Grandmother's footsteps.

Week 3:

1/28: **Read Games 175-215**

Games: Machine of Rhythms, Peruvian Ball Game, and West Side Story.
Discuss reading. The Image of the Hour. Image Theatre Techniques 1a/b

1/30: Games: The point of Focus..., Imaginary Journey, One Blind one...
Image Theatre Techniques Continued: Multiple Images 1&2, Discuss work and reading.

Week 4:

2/5: **Read Games p241-76**

Games: The Balancing circle, Noises, The Vampire of Strasbourg.

2/7: Games: Goalkeeper, Without leaving... 1, 2, 5 & 6.
Discuss reading, Forum topic brainstorm, Divide groups & topics, Machines.

Week 5:

2/12: **Read Course Pack Section 4: Playwrighting (LT p53-81)**

Games: One person we Fear, Plain Mirror, Subject & Image swap, Distorting Mirror.
Discuss Reading, Devise forum pieces

2/14:
Warm-up of Group choice, Devise forum pieces

Week 6:

2/19: **Read Course Pack Section 5: Sample Forum Script**

Play Forum Pieces for ensemble, discuss.
Stop! Think!, Interrogation, Swapping Characters

2/21: **Our Favorite Games and Invited Forum Performances**

Week 7:

2/26: **DUE: Performance reaction paper (In class); Read Games p277-288**

Games: Antiquated Telephone, Animals 1-4, Follow the Master.
Discuss Performances, Invisible theatre.

2/28: ***NO CLASS (MATC)***

Midterm Peer Evaluations due (Blackboard)

Online Invisible Theatre Discussion Response and Brainstorm Due by Thursday at 4pm: Brainstorm at least three themes for an Invisible theatre scene. Imagine the scenes. What characters are in it? What action happens? Who is your desired audience? What is your ideal reaction? Where would you play the scene? What specific dangers are there in this scenario? How would you avoid them? Please respond or comment on at least two other people's ideas: did they overlook a danger? Can you think of a safer or more effective action/location/audience?

Week 8:

3/4: **Read Course Pack Section 6: Games p.298-301, TO in the US (PB p110-123), AND Pedagogy of the Oppressed Chapter 2**

Games: Several Actors on Stage, Homage to Magritte, The Designated Leader.
Discuss reading and discussion posts. The great game of power, chairs in empty space, six chairs. Group choice games.

3/6: ***NO CLASS (SETC)***

3/11: ***SPRING BREAK***

3/13: ***SPRING BREAK***

Week 9:

3/18: **Read: Types of Popular theatre (LT p213-45)**

Games: Murder at Hotel Agato, characters in movement, game of presenter's choice.

Devise Invisible theatre pieces (in groups)

3/20: Devise Invisible Theatre Pieces

Games: Cops and Robbers, Fainting at Frejus, game of presenter's choice.

Week 10:

3/25: **Invisible theatre groups 1 and 2 Perform**

3/27: Invisible Theatre groups 3 and 4 Perform

Week 11:

4/1: Performance Papers (In class), Discuss final Project Options

Games: Three Irish Duels, The Bear of Poitiers, The Chair.

4/3: Final Project Prep

Games: The Glass Cobra, Sea Waves variation, The rolling Carpet.

Week 12:

4/8: Read: Overview of The Theatre of The Oppressed (Babbage)

Final Project Prep

Games: Walk, Stop, Justify, 2 by 3 by Bradford, The big Chief

4/10: Final Project Prep

Games: Portuguese Rhythmic Shoes and Variations 1&2, game of presenter's choice.

Week 13:

4/15: Final Project Prep

Games: The Blind Car, The Sound of Seven Doorways

4/17: Final Project Prep

Games: Ball Games, The Fighting Cocks, and The Child's Dream.

Week 14:

4/22: FINAL PERFORMANCES /PRESENTATIONS

4/24: FINAL PERFORMANCES/PRESENTATIONS

Week 15:

4/29: Final Peer Evaluations Due BEFORE CLASS.

Silent Walk.

5/6: FINAL PAPERS DUE IN MY BOX BY 12 NOON

What to Know and Do To Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>). Keep your information up-to-date.
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>).
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

Honor Code:

(From the VCU Resource Guide)

Academic dishonesty jeopardizes the quality of education and depreciates the genuine achievements of others. Academic dishonesty by a student will not be tolerated and will be treated in accordance with the procedures as outlined in the Honor System. If a student violates the Honor System, that student will suffer consequences. However, appropriate opportunities to remediate the situation and for the student to learn and to grow from the mistake will be considered.

The categories of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, any deliberate and dishonest act that results in, or could result in, a student receiving an unfair advantage in an academic matter:

Plagiarism: Representing the words, ideas, facts, opinions, theories, illustrations, tables or any part of another's work as one's own on academic assignment without customary and proper acknowledgment of the source;

Cheating: Receiving, giving and attempting to receive or give unauthorized assistance, such as materials, devices, information, notes, or sources, on academic matters;

Lying: Transferring, transmitting or communicating any false statements concerning academic matters;

Stealing: Taking or making academic materials inaccessible, thereby temporarily or permanently depriving others of its use or possession, and;

Facilitation: Helping or soliciting another person to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Disabilities Disclosure:

Please let the instructor know as soon as possible if you require any accommodations.

Student Responsibilities for Requesting Accommodations:

Register with Disability Support Services.

- Provide current documentation of the disability to the DSS Coordinator.
- Discuss accommodation needs with the DSS Coordinator.
- Give accommodation letter to professors.
- Monitor effectiveness of accommodations.

Faculty Responsibilities:

- Provide accommodations, which are listed on the student's accommodation letter.
- Respect student privacy.

NOTE: All students who identify themselves to faculty as having a disability or suspect that they have a disability should be encouraged to identify themselves to the Coordinator of Disability Support Services (DSS) on their respective campus. Faculty are not obligated to provide accommodations without proper notification from the DSS Office.

BY REMAINING IN THIS COURSE YOU AGREE TO ABIDE BY THE HONOR CODE AND RULES OF CONDUCT OUTLINED IN THIS SYLLABUS AND IN THE VCU STUDENT HANDBOOK, INCLUDING DISABILITIES DISCLOSURE.

APPENDIX D

“Women INK” by Emily Oye:

Hillary looking chic in a black quilted coat. She was first lady in an unfortunate era of power suits and headbands, but during this campaign, she has kept it more approachable. On her arm is Bill, looking rather casual in what can only be described as a cosby sweater.

And we have the other Democratic candidate, Mr. Barack Obama, seen here smooching his lovely wife, Michelle. Michelle keeps it clean in a black sheath, but livens it up with a snakeskin belt. Is America ready for a fashionable first lady, a la Jackie Kennedy? I hope so.

That may be bad news, then, for John McCain, seen here with his wife Cindy. Even Barbie would pass up that pink leather jacket, Cindy. And why the frown? Is it because you realized the turtleneck makes you resemble its namesake?

Harper’s Bazzar suggests another candidate for first woman president: Donatella Verasace! Here is cartoonist (and cancer survivor) Marissa Acocella Marchetto’s take on Donatella’s winning platform! Of course, Donatello wears her own collection. Just think what she would do the oval office – Versace Home all the way!

* * *

Remember Condi Rice stepping out in beautiful black leather boots and a black leather coat a few years ago? For a meeting in Israel, she looked more diplomat than dominatrix. Rice planned to meet with Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Palestine officials, and Jordan’s King Abdullah. Rice insists that she is not trying to “insert American ideas” into these fragile peace negotiations, but instead, to foster unity. Good luck, Condi. And, a happy 60th birthday to Israel!

Also in the Middle East is blonde bombshell Jessica Simpson! J.Simp took a break from Tony Romeo to entertain the troops at Kuwait's Camp Buehring on March 10th. For her surprise concert, she donned her signature daisy dukes, but look what she does to cameo! And even that helmet can't suppress her curls. Ken Paves must have had to work overtime to make her tresses look that good in the dessert!

These Philippine women might not have Jessica's glossy lips, but they certainly have her beat when it comes to ammo! *Marie Claire* – the magazine for women who are “more than just a pretty face” -- sent a reporter inside the New People's Army for a “rare glimpse of their secret lies.” This seems to include combat training, as seen by 19 year old Lenlen; learning – Lenlen again, teaching young recruits the alphabet, and romance – 22 year old Giegie met her fiancé, Dods, while training in this rebel army. The women claim that joining the NPA is for the best – “there's no life outside it,” says Giegie. It is true that the women receive an education in Communist politics, but little else. The NPA currently has over 7,000 members and is classified as a terrorist group by the US and the EU.

* * *

Also in *Marie Claire* is this month's Win IT! Opportunity. 50 winners have the chance to score over \$50 of sweet nothings from figleaves.com. Valentine's Day may be over, but wedding season is upon us! For you single bridesmaids looking for a groom, this could certainly up your odds!

Russian women understand that single gals need some help to get the guy, and sometimes, delectable lingere just doesn't cut it. Russian women are putting up thousands of rubels in order to get a leg up in the treacherous world of millionaire dating. Apparently, it's harder to keep a millionaire in your bed than navigate icy sidewalks in stilettos. Classes such as “How to Bring Back your Honeymoon” teach women new bedroom techniques with props such as stuffed animals, and lollipops. One class offers a measurement of kegel muscle strength and tips on how to improve the staying power. Ella Videnina credits the class for breathing new life into her fifth marriage. “The best thing I learned was never to refuse him anything in bed,” she says. “He gave me a new car and a plasma TV for my birthday.” For those of you who can't jet to

Moscow for six weeks, websites like therules.com and whymenmarrybitches.com offer you similar tips – and probably without a stuffed tiger.

A little further east, women in Asia also know that sex sells. But actress Darryl Hannah wants to change that. Last November, she spoke at the United Nations about her documentary about the brothels of Southern Asia. She toured Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos, and in order to interview the women, she had to do some of her best acting: “I went in with a guy and played the part of a pervert; we’d act like we were a couple looking for a kid. The pimps would show us all the girls – in some cases, they were girls as young as eight.” Hannah hopes her film will shed light on the sexual slavery trade that powers the Southeastern economy.

That’s all we have time for tonight. As always, if the news fits – buy it in three colors! Goodnight!

VITA

Chanelle Vigue was born in Bend, Oregon in 1983. She fell in love with theatre in elementary school and has never been unfaithful. She graduated cum Laude with her BFA in Theatre Education from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2006.

Chanelle remained at VCU for her Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy, with foci in directing and theatre history. While completing her MFA, she has taught Effective Speech, Introduction to Performance, and created and taught a course on the Theatre of the Oppressed at VCU. She has also created an online program called “The Podcast Playhouse” that features staged readings of new and unpublished plays, which is now available on iTunes.

Chanelle will be attending Bowling Green State University in Ohio in the fall of 2008 as a PhD candidate in the Theatre and Film department.